

**[Dee Cook]**

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FOLKWAYS

Wm. V. Ervin, P. W.

McLennan County, Texas.

District No. 8 [????]

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Interview with Dee Cook, early day peace officer of McLennan County, South Fifth Street, Waco, Texas.

"A good many years ago there was a newspaper man here by the name of A. B. Davis who wrote for the local papers and the St. Louis Globe-Democrat. I'd often give him news. He never did publish anything I asked him not to, or didn't until I told him he could. He didn't publish things without knowing the facts. One of the biggest fights I ever saw came up over things he published.

"One time I was called to go down on the river and arrest a nigger who had badly beaten his little stepson. I went to get the nigger. I found the boy out in a cornfield where he had run away to hide, and he had built him a hut of cornstalks and was eating roasting ears to live on. His back was one solid scab. When I got back to town with his stepdaddy Davis

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met me, as he had been told where I had gone, and he wanted the story. I told him all about it, and he wrote it up and sent it to the Globe-Democrat. He showed me a check for nine dollars, they had sent to him for it. The paper got letters from all over the country about that, and I got some, too, and so did Davis. [C-12 Texas?]

“The fight was made by John Magee, who was jailer at that time, which while Pete Ross was sheriff in the late seventies, I was deputy then. John was a big man strong as a horse, and he was a mighty good man. somebody for a joke had given some of the prisoners some food that had moulded, and the prisoners showed it to a preacher who had come to the jail to preach a sermon for them; and they told him that was the kind of food they had to eat. I guess they did it for a joke as Magee always fed the prisoners good food. I had eaten some of it, and it was good. The preacher believed them, and he told Jere Hutchings, who was reporter for the paper, 2 which was published by Major J. W. Downs. Downs printed in the paper, and he ought to have known better. None of them investigated to see if it was true.

“Well, John Magee was good and mad. When I came along he had Downs' head under his left arm and was giving it to him in the face with his right fist. Downs was a little man, but he was a scrapper, too, but he wasn't doing much with John then. John worked Jere over next, and knocked him around somewhat; and John Sleeper, who was a cousin of Jere, saw what was happening to Jere so he came running up to take Jere's part. Sleeper and Clifton had a store near where the fight was taking place, on the square. John hit Sleeper and knocked him away out there, and Sleeper jumped up and went running into his house and yelling for a piece of raw meat to put on his face to keep it from turning black. Pete Ross came out and separated John Magee and Jere.

“A day or two before the fight, or maby it was the same day, Judge Gerald was holding court in a building on the north side of the square, and some of the lawyers didn't do what he told them to, and he threw the inkwells and books at them, and they sure paid attention to him after that.”

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“J. R. Meers, chief of the Waco Fire Department remembered some more of Judge Gerald's court methods. “If a witness wouldn't testify,” said Mr. Meers, “The judge would tell them, “You'll testify in this court, or I'll throw you so far back in that jail you'll rot before they think of you again.’ Usually the witnesses testified. One time a gambler by the name of Skeeter Root was here then and came up before Judge Gerald. Skeeter was a little, dapper, man always looked like he came out of a banbox. He took a contemptuous attitude toward the Judge and the court because he expected only to be fined, and he had plenty of money to pay it with. The judge says, Skeeter Root, I fine you one hundred dollars—’ 3 Skeeter hardly let the judge finish what he was saying when he says, ‘Got it right here in my pocket, judge,’ and jerked out a hundred-dollar bill and tossed it at the judge. The judge says, ‘And ninety days in jail. Got that in your pocket, too, Mr. Skeeter Root?’”